

Care and Benefits Act (Public Law 106-117; 113 Stat. 1568) is amended by striking "subsection (c)(1)" and inserting "subsection (c)(3)".

(2) Effective November 21, 1977, and as if included therein as originally enacted, section 402(e) of the Veterans' Benefits Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-114; 111 Stat. 2294) is amended by striking "second sentence" and inserting "third sentence".

In lieu of the House amendment to the title of the bill, amend the title so as to read: "An Act to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the rates of educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill, to improve procedures for the adjustment of rates of pay for nurses employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, to make other improvements in veterans educational assistance, health care, and benefits programs, and for other purposes.".

VETERANS BENEFITS ACT OF 2000

SPECTER (AND ROCKEFELLER) AMENDMENTS NOS. 4315-4316

Mr. MURKOWSKI (for Mr. SPECTER and Mr. ROCKEFELLER) proposed two amendments to the bill (H.R. 4850) to provide a cost-of-living adjustment in rates of compensation paid to veterans with service-connected disabilities, to enhance programs providing compensation and life insurance benefits for veterans, and for other purposes; as follows:

AMENDMENT No. 4315

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2000".

SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 2000, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) COMPENSATION.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under sections 1115(1) of such title.

(3) CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of such title.

(4) NEW DIC RATES.—The dollar amounts in effect under paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 1311(a) of such title.

(5) OLD DIC RATES.—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1311(a)(3) of such title.

(6) ADDITIONAL DIC FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES WITH MINOR CHILDREN.—The dollar amount in effect under section 1311(b) of such title.

(7) ADDITIONAL DIC FOR DISABILITY.—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1311(c) and 1311(d) of such title.

(8) DIC FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN.—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.—(1) The increase under subsection (a) shall be made in the dollar amounts specified in subsection (b) as in effect on November 30, 2000.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), each such amount shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2000, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(3) Each dollar amount increased pursuant to paragraph (2) shall, if not a whole dollar amount, be rounded down to the next lower whole dollar amount.

(d) SPECIAL RULE.—The Secretary may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons within the purview of section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who are not in receipt of compensation payable pursuant to chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

At the same time as the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2001, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b) of section 2, as increased pursuant to that section.

AMENDMENT No. 4316

Amend the title so as to read: "An Act to increase, effective as of December 1, 2000, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.".

PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Alex Mitrakos, a detailee to the VA-HUD subcommittee be granted the privilege of the floor during consideration of H.R. 4635, the VA-HUD appropriations bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I ask consent that Peter Washburn, a fellow in the Environment Committee, be granted the privilege of the floor during consideration of H.R. 4635.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WARNER. I ask unanimous consent that Patricia Lewis of the Senate Armed Services Committee be granted privileges of the floor during consideration of the conference report accompanying H.R. 4205.

Mr. CLELAND. I ask unanimous consent that Tricia Heller and Geoff Gauger be granted the privilege of the floor during consideration of the Department of Defense authorization conference report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. I ask unanimous consent that Kyndra Jordan, who is a correspondent in my office, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of the debate on the Defense authorization bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HIGH STEENS AREA OF SOUTHEASTERN OREGON

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President, I will not speak but a minute, along with my colleague, Senator WYDEN. He and I come to the floor to celebrate what Senator CRAIG will do later this evening by unanimous consent, and that is passage of H.R. 4828. It has to do with the high Steens area of southeastern Oregon. It is a beautiful and pristine area.

What we have done is truly bipartisan and truly historic in that the Sierra Club and the Oregon Cattlemen's Association enthusiastically support it. They support it because this has been a product of dialog and not Executive dictate. This has come about because people of good will have said: How can we protect the environment and protect the people as well? We have accomplished that in this bill. We are creating 170,000 acres of wilderness and providing other places for people to pursue their ranching lifestyles, and we are preserving the economy of Harney County.

I thank all of my colleagues—my colleague in the Senate, Senator WYDEN; Congressman WALDEN; all of the Oregon Congressmen, Republicans and Democrats alike; and the Governor of Oregon as well; and Secretary Bruce Babbitt who worked with us in good faith to make this possible. I thank the Chair and yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, my friend and colleague, Senator SMITH, has said it extremely well, and I know our colleague Senator REED is waiting to speak, so I, too, will be very brief.

My view is that this Steens legislation is a monumental wilderness triumph. This legislation creates for the first time in statute cow-free wilderness. In the past, wilderness designations allowed the continuation of historic grazing practices, but because the ranchers in the Steens recognize the delicate nature of this ecosystem and because they were willing to work with Democrats and Republicans in our congressional delegation, Congressman GREG WALDEN, Congressman PETER DEFazio, and so many of our colleagues, we were able to build a coalition for a truly historic approach to protecting our wilderness.

We were able to find acceptable alternative grazing sites. Almost 100,000 acres of the total wilderness designation is now going to be by law cow free. In my view, this is just an example, a precedent of how communities can work together to protect our treasures.

All across this country when there are debates about national monuments, the sides go into opposing and what amounts to warring camps, the decibel level gets very high, and there is an awful lot of finger pointing and accusations.

In Oregon, we did it differently. We came up with an Oregon solution. Like Senator SMITH, I am very proud of

what we have been able to achieve. This is a model that our delegation is going to use to tackle other critical natural resource questions and, frankly, we are especially proud tonight because we think that with our Steens bill, we set a model for other communities across this country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

LIBERIAN IMMIGRANTS

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I want to take a moment to discuss the issue of Liberians in the United States who, up until a few days ago, faced an imminent threat of deportation. Today, through Executive action, that has been stayed at least for a year, but it is a community of people residing here who are literally living on the edge, not knowing if next year at this time they will, in fact, be deported back to Liberia, which is a country in great turmoil and crisis as we speak.

For the last several years I have tried with diligence and determination to do justice for these people, to give them a chance to become permanent residents of this country and ultimately citizens of this country. In my determination and my dedication, I have objected to the consideration of other legislation regarding immigrant groups, not because this legislation lacked merit, but because, in my view, it was unfair not to consider in some way the plight of the Liberians who are in the United States today.

I hope at this point, given assurances by the White House that this issue of justice for Liberians in the United States is a paramount issue for the President in the final days of this Congress in his negotiation with the congressional leadership, that the legislation I have objected to can and will move forward promptly.

Let me try to explain briefly the status of Liberians in this country.

In 1989, Liberia, which historically is a country with close ties with Africa and the United States—it was founded by freed American slaves; its capital is Monrovia, named after our President James Monroe—this country in 1989 was engulfed in a brutal civil war. This civil war over the next 7 years would claim 150,000 lives; it would displace the population; it would destroy infrastructure. In 1991, realizing the gravity of this crisis, the Attorney General of the United States granted temporary protective status to approximately 14,000 Liberians. They were allowed to remain in the United States. They could apply for work authorization, and they could work during this temporary protective status.

This status was renewed annually because of the crisis in Liberia until 1999. In that year, it was determined that since there had been at least an election of democratic reform in Liberia, and since the situation of armed conflict had subsided, temporary protec-

tive status was no longer required. But rather than immediate deportation, the President decided to authorize something which is known as deferred enforced departure, or DED, essentially telling the Liberian community in the United States: You are subject to deportation today, but we are simply deferring that for at least a year.

Just recently, again at the end of last month, we were able to get another Executive extension, but essentially what we are doing to these good people is putting their lives on hold one year at a time. They are unable to establish the same kind of permanency that we are seeking for other groups in this country.

They are good and decent people who have worked hard. They are a vital part of our community, and in the intervening almost 10 years, they have established themselves; quite literally many of them have children born here who are American citizens.

Yet each year we force these people to worry, to be concerned, to contemplate the very idea of leaving a home they have found and established here, taking with them children who know nothing of their native land, taking with them their skills which are not particularly useful, and going into a country that is violent.

Yesterday, the President of the United States and our Department of State declared the President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, persona non grata in the United States. He cannot get a visa to come here because of his deportations within Liberia, because of his support of a campaign of terror in Sierra Leone. We have all been horrified by the pictures of mutilated children in Sierra Leone. This is all part of his involvement there—his trading guns for diamonds, his attempt to destabilize the country, and defy international law.

That is the situation in Liberia, a situation, I might add, which we have also recognized is a threat to Americans. Our State Department is advising Americans they should not go to Liberia. We are withdrawing nonessential embassy personnel from Liberia. Yet we are unable to tell these Liberians in America: You can stay here and become permanent residents.

In fact, we are saying: We are prepared to deport you at the end of next year because that is the message that DED gives. I think it is wrong. I think it is unjust.

So I objected to certain measures. I think it is important to point out these measures.

First, there was legislation, H.R. 4681, to provide an adjustment status for Syrian Jews. These individuals came to the United States in 1992 through an arrangement between President Bush and President Assad of Syria. They were allowed to leave the country to seek refuge in the United States. But part of the negotiations, part of the fiction was that they would leave Syria on tourist visas. So they

came to the United States. They did not come as refugees. They came as asylees. They sought asylum when they entered here.

Under our immigration law, there is a limit on the number of asylees that can adjust to permanent status each year. But it is important to point out, these individuals, these very good decent people, these Syrian Jews, are not in danger of being deported back to Syria.

Liberians are in grave danger of being deported back to Liberia. Essentially what this legislation would do—and I would support this legislation—is it would jump in ahead of other asylees who are waiting to fulfill the yearly quota of the number of asylees who can become permanent residents.

So this is a situation of concern and importance, but not the level of criticality, I believe, with respect to the Liberian community. Yet this legislation has moved through this House promptly, is on the verge of passage, while still the Liberian legislation languishes. I do not think that is right. I do not think it is just. I don't care. I certainly am pleased literally within a few days these Syrian Jews will have a chance to adjust to permanent status. Again, what about the Liberians?

There is another piece of legislation, the religious worker visa extension bill, which is also known as the Mother Teresa Religious Worker Act. This bill will allow the religious to come to the United States on a visa to do pastoral work.

It has been in effect for several years. It is a good program. About 2,500 workers come in a year. Very importantly, once these individuals are here, they can also adjust to permanent residency status, unlike the Liberians who now, under our DED, cannot do that. It is a worthy program, but it is a program, again, that I do not think has the same kind of compelling justice that the Liberians have in their case.

We again applaud the fact that this piece of legislation is likely to become law. But what about the Liberians?

There is also another piece of legislation that would grant immediate citizenship to children adopted internationally by the American public. Once again, these children are not in any danger of being returned to their homeland involuntarily. The Liberians are in such danger.

Each time now that a child is adopted, they come in on a visa. The adoptive parents can fill out an application for citizenship on behalf of the child and pay a \$2,500 fee. The application is then considered with all other applications for permanent residency. It takes a few years, but these children are virtually assured of becoming American citizens.

Let me try to suggest the incongruity of not dealing with the Liberian legislation in the same way we are dealing with this type of legislation.

If we do not, next September, grant DED, we could be in the awkward position of having legislation which would